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A Defence Policy in Waiting? Proposals from the Canadian Alliance¹

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The Canadian Alliance (CA) has outlined its views on Canadian defence policy in a paper entitled *Canada Strong and Free: A Defence Strategy for the New Millennium*. It is intended to complement the Alliance Party's views on Canadian foreign policy set out as *Canada and the Millennium: A New Look at Foreign Policy*.²

The policy statement is the product of research based on a variety of government and non-government sources, and contains much food for thought and several sound ideas. Among them are promises to restore the morale of members of the Canadian Forces (CF) and give them new equipment. It is particularly strong in laying out the current problems faced by the CF in trying to do too much with inadequate resources. However, it also lacks depth in some areas, and shows the sort of weaknesses defence analysts might expect when *political* documents try to pass themselves off as *policy* documents. Its explanations of how it intends to solve some of the problems it has identified are also sometimes sketchy.

The challenges that the CA considers particularly noteworthy are listed in several of the Appendices to *Canada Strong and Free*. The analyses of army personnel shortcomings,

as well as equipment deficiencies in Appendix Two are perceptive and accurate. Other current problems are outlined throughout the document along with proposed solutions. So too are the CA's views of the international and domestic aspects of defence policy formulation and implementation. It is in some of these areas that the paper either lacks focus or needs rethinking.

Defence Policy and its Objectives

Defence policy is a government's or prospective government's view on how much of the national resource base will be applied to creating and sustaining military forces, and where and when those forces will be deployed and employed in military operations to support foreign (and in some cases domestic) policy objectives.

Current defence policy does most of these things. So too does the proposed policy set out in *Canada Strong and Free*. Current policy, however, has not been fully implemented in the six years that have passed since it was promulgated. Indeed, a recent study by a leading defence scholar suggests that many of the operational commitments promised in the 1994 Defence White Paper may now be difficult to fulfill.³

Since 1945 Canadian defence policy has had four pillars. Their order of priority may vary from govern-

ment to government, but they are: the protection of Canadian sovereignty; cooperating with the United States in the defence of North America; collective defence of the western democracies through such mechanisms as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO); and contributing to international security, often through peacekeeping, peacemaking or peace restoration operations, generally but not necessarily under United Nations auspices. What follows is an overview of how the CA approaches these and other matters.

Chapter 1: The Purpose of Canadian Defence Policy

The title of Chapter 1 of *Canada Strong and Free* is somewhat misleading. While much of the content of the chapter is accurate, the reader will search in vain for a succinct statement of the purpose of Canadian defence policy and its objectives. The chapter does, however, set out what the CA sees as the military tasks or missions of the CF. These are: defending Canada and protecting Canadian sovereignty; defending vital Canadian interests and contributing to collective defence in NATO and NORAD, and; supporting Canadian diplomacy as required. The Alliance's interpretation of what these three missions entail fits more or less into the four traditional themes of Canadian defence policy if "supporting

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diplomacy" includes UN-type stability operations.

The chapter defines "vital interests" as "those political, economic and strategic interests for which Canada is prepared to put the lives of its citizen soldiers on the line."⁴ Wisely, perhaps, it does not spell out what such vital interests might include; such a bold step could either restrict the ability of any government to respond to a future crisis or result in the commitment of armed forces to too many missions. Is the preservation of a united Canada a vital national interest? Is the maintenance of good relations with the US another? *Canada Strong and Free* does not say. It does, however, note that "The identification and assessment of vital Canadian interests requires continuous analysis and discussion [and] Parliament must be at the forefront of such a discussion". It then notes that "...we have a moral duty to ensure that our soldiers' lives are not put at risk unless: Canada's vital interests are genuinely at stake; [and] our forces are properly equipped and have the resources needed before undertaking a foreign mission."⁵ These noble sentiments were frequently ignored in the past. A Canadian Alliance government might do so again in an unforeseen emergency, although any effort to clarify the circumstances under which the CF is deployed should be welcomed.

Chapter 2: Canada's Strategic Environment

There are certain influences that must be considered if Canadian defence policy is to be credible and effective. Apart from Canada's vital interests, these include the international environment, alliance commitments and even Canadian trade and other commercial links with the rest of the world.

Chapter 2 of *Canada Strong and Free* presents the CA assessment of these issues. Much of it is reasonable and logical, but parts of it raise more questions than they answer. Consider:

- The words "United Nations" and "UN" do not appear anywhere therein. Canadian interests and

values contributed to our joining the UN when it was founded in 1945. They continue to be key reasons for our participation in peacekeeping and peace restoration operations around the world. Many of these have been under the UN umbrella: Korea, the UN Truce Supervisory Operation (UNTSO) in the Middle East, and Cyprus are examples. However, Canada has also undertaken similar activities outside the UN; the International Commission for Supervision and Control (ICSC) in the former French Indochina and the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) in the Sinai, for example. Canadian governments have almost always said "Yes" to requests for help in such cases, often out of altruism and a desire to help foster international stability. Does the omission mean that a CA government would reject future international stability operations either inside or outside of a UN framework?

- Citing the Party's foreign policy document, *Canada and the Millennium*, the chapter suggests that any Canadian government should "...focus its attention and resources on those regions that are the most important to Canada...the United States and North America; Russia and the circum-polar region; Europe; and the Pacific Rim...it is from these regions that serious challenges to Canadian security can emanate."⁶ This eliminates Africa, the Indian subcontinent, the Middle East and Persian Gulf, and all of South and Central America from Canada's defence, strategic, diplomatic and economic purview. Would a CA government thus pull out of the Commonwealth, the Organization of American States, and la Francophonie? Would it turn down UN or allied requests to send troops to any of these areas, and bring our peacekeepers home from the Golan Heights, the Sinai, the Persian Gulf, Cambodia and Africa?⁷

- While maintaining good relations with the US is a Canadian interest, and "effective American engagement is international security affairs is vital for international stability", it is *not* true that "it is certainly never in Canada's interest to obstruct such involvement."⁸ Canada has done just that when its interests have clashed with US interests in the past. One example: over Cuba when the US Helms-Burton Act threatened legitimate Canadian-Cuban business agreements.⁹

Chapter 3: The Defence Budget

In many respects the defence budget is a key measure of the sincerity of any defence policy proposals. *Canada Strong and Free* proposes to increase the defence budget by \$2-billion in two years as a short-term solution to current CF equipment, operational training and personnel shortfalls. The defence budget will gradually increase until it reaches a level equal to between 1.7 and 2.1 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by the years 2010 to 2015 (2.1% of GDP is the current average for NATO nations).¹⁰ The CA believes the necessary money can be found to make this proposal a reality without cutting transfers to the provinces for health and education. Instead, funds can be found by drawing on budgetary surpluses, reducing federal spending in some government departments, and rationalizing defence infrastructure. It is stated that such measures "will firmly address [the] \$30-billion equipment shortfall identified by the Auditor General in 1999 and provide the basis for additional force enhancements."¹¹

Can it be done? Previous defence policy changes were designed to free up money to purchase modern equipment. All of them had some impact on the shape of the CF, but none significantly increased capital spending. The policy does not specify which departments could be cut back or by how much. The Alliance promise to purchase off-the-shelf equipment without expensive industrial and regional benefit (IRB) offsets, and

"greatly simplify the procurement process"¹² might help save money. But all governments are susceptible to political pressure from regions eager to receive a chunk of federal contracts.

Chapter 4: Key Defence Priorities and Capability Requirements

Chapter 4 outlines some of the projects that higher defence spending will fund. For the Navy, these include a fleet of "helicopter-capable corvettes/offshore patrol vessels" which may be given to either the Coast Guard or the Navy. There would be replacements for the Sea King maritime helicopters and the four Tribal class destroyers, and an upgrade and later replacement for the Aurora maritime patrol aircraft. The replacement of the two operational support ships with at least four new ones is also proposed, and all should be able to transport and support troops overseas. There is also an increase in the submarine fleet to enable it to cover both coasts, and to include an under-ice capability for the arctic. This might be met, the paper suggests, by nuclear powered submarines.

The Air Force will receive an upgrade for the CF-18 fleet, which will eventually be replaced by a new fighter. It will also get precision guided munitions for its fighters, and some heavy air transport of the C-17 type for strategic airlift. These could replace some of the older Hercules tactical transports now in service. It might also receive heavy helicopters able to operate from the support ships to deliver soldiers and their kit to shore in "trying conditions."¹³ Whether the acquisitions can be covered by the proposed spending increase is unclear because the price of each is not specified.

For the regular Army, *Canada Strong and Free* contains a mix of good news and bad. Soldiers will be equipped to enable them to fight in medium to high-intensity war. This means new tanks, artillery, electronic gear and other high technology kit demanded by the so-called Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA). These purchases, together with the

Navy's support ships and Air Force's strategic transport, will provide one brigade group for service anywhere in the Euro-Atlantic Area or Pacific Rim within 60 days. The paper also proposes resurrecting a Special Service Force (SSF), giving it light equipment and helicopters, and basing it near fixed-wing air transport support from whence it can respond quickly to emergencies anywhere in Canada, including the Arctic.

There are some problems with this SSF concept. It contradicts the defence of Canada role assigned to the Militia. It also fails to recognize that a well-trained mechanized brigade group is able to respond quickly to emergencies anywhere; the Canadian Air Sea Transportable (CAST) Brigade in Petawawa was prepared to do this for many years until it was "morphed" into the less flexible, and thus less useful SSF.

Some other bad news: the regular Army will apparently consist of only the one heavy brigade group and the smaller, lighter SSF. This could present problems; the current three brigade groups cannot keep up with the current pace of operations, so a smaller regular Army may be even more badly overstretched. While the need for a mobilization plan to augment these two formations from the Militia gets a passing mention, it does not appear as a formal recommendation, nor does it seem to suggest a national level mobilization if necessary.

The Reserves will grow to a strength of about 60,000. The land component, the Militia, will comprise 45,000 to 50,000 of this total, and be given primary responsibility for internal defence tasks. To carry them out, it will be properly equipped and trained to regular force standards. There are some weaknesses in these concepts. For instance, the CA does not spell out how Reservists who only train one night a week can meet the standards of the regular force who are available for training and operations all the time. This is important, as regular force standards are often needed in peacekeeping and Aid to the Civil Power operations. It also does not say what tasks will be given

to Air and Naval Reservists. One can only assume that they will remain unchanged.

Chapter 5: Esprit de Corps

Chapter 5 contains a number of recommendations that will seem like "motherhood" to those who served in the CF through years of integration, unification, the creation of a single National Defence Headquarters, the emphasis on management, social engineering, declining budgets in real dollar terms, and years of personnel cutbacks. Of particular note are plans to simplify the personnel evaluation system used to select people for future advancement, the creation of a military headquarters separate from the departmental headquarters, the restoration of the titles of Royal Canadian Navy, Canadian Army and Royal Canadian Air Force, a greater operational focus for the CF, more emphasis on leadership, and more Parliamentary oversight in defence matters. Less sensible are blanket calls for a reduction in the size of the officer corps, the retention of integration at the highest levels of the CF, and the creation of an Inspector General for the CF.

The size of the officer corps is a complicated issue. While reductions can and perhaps should be made in some areas, they must be done with care. Many middle- and high-ranking officers occupy essential positions in various DND offices, such as project management and doctrine development. Others occupy important foreign postings. Any attempt to rationalize the size of the officer corps must bear in mind the important work that goes on behind the scenes — work that only uniformed officers can perform.

The idea of an Inspector General (IG) is an American concept that surfaces from time to time in Canada. The Office of the Auditor General and the DND Ombudsman already perform many of the functions of a US military IG. In addition, a Canadian officer corps that looks after its troops and its other responsibilities, that ensures its legitimate orders are carried out, that pays attention to a

working Redress of Grievance system, and always behaves ethically will not need the "help" of an Inspector General.

There are two important ideas that do not appear in this or any other part of *Canada Strong and Free*. The first is the restoration of an objective officer assessment system (including promotion exams) to complement the subjective personnel evaluation system recommended in this chapter. The second is even more contentious. While the CA recommends that "all policies designed to socially engineer the military should be terminated and all recruiting quotas...should be abolished,"¹⁴ the CF should still make a reasonable attempt to mirror the best aspects of Canadian social reality. This can be done not through quotas, but through giving everyone who can meet realistic operational, physical and ethical standards the chance to serve in a CF uniform. The one current standard that could be modified downward is educational. Given time and patience, the CF training system is capable of turning less educated civilians into effective service personnel.¹⁵ Those who lack current educational standards should, if they meet the other prerequisites, be given a chance to train for CF careers.

Conclusion

Canada Strong and Free concludes that it is "a good blueprint" for the renewal of Canadian defence policy. Certainly it sets ambitious goals for re-building the CF, but one wonders if the numerous capital acquisition proposals have been thoroughly costed out. It is actually more like a skeleton which will need to be fleshed out and given the breath of life if the Canadian Alliance ever forms a government and becomes serious about reforming Canada's defence policy and its armed forces.

Notes

1. The author is grateful to BGen (Retd) Christopher deL Kirby for his perceptive views of the CA defence policy paper.
2. *Canada Strong and Free: A Defence Strategy for the New Millennium*, Canadian Alliance, (no date or place of publication), subsequently referred to as *Canada Strong and Free*. The defence policy recommendations from the Alliance foreign policy paper, *Canada and the Millennium*, Canadian Alliance, November 1999 (no place of publication) are set out in Appendix Five to *Canada Strong and Free*.
3. Joseph Jockel, *Canadian Forces: Hard Choices, Soft Power* (Toronto: Canadian Institute of Strategic Studies, 1999).
4. *Canada Strong and Free*, 6.
5. Ibid., 7.
6. Ibid., 8. The discussion of Asia-Pacific concerns on page 11 is limited to China, the Koreans and Indonesia.
7. Ibid., 11. Indeed, page 12 suggests that a Canadian presence in the Persian Gulf (1990-91) and the Golan Heights (1974 to the present according to the Alliance; actually Canadian UN Military Observers have been on the Golan Heights in the UNTSO since before the Korean War) are "mostly symbolic". This will be news to Canadian soldiers, sailors and aviators who have risked their lives for Canada in these and other areas in the past, and continue to do so to the present day. Such future deployments could be rejected by an Alliance government; page 12 notes that "we cannot be the world's 911 number...we should certainly never expend Canadian resources or risk Canadian lives intervening in regional crises where we do not fully understand the politics of the region..." What Canadian government has ever fully understood the politics of any region where Canadian troops have been sent for humanitarian or strategic purposes? This is condescending and overly simplistic.

dian troops have been sent for humanitarian or strategic purposes? This is condescending and overly simplistic.

8. Ibid., 8.
9. See Evan H. Potter, "Canada and Helms-Burton: The Perils of Coalition Building," in Andrew F. Cooper and Geoffrey Hayes, *Worthwhile Initiatives? Canadian Mission-Oriented Diplomacy* (Toronto, Irwin Publishing, 2000). There are other examples of differences between US and Canadian interests cited in this and other articles in this book.
10. *Canada Strong and Free*, 13-14. Of the 19 NATO nations, 16 spend more than Canada does on defence as a percentage of GDP. Currently Canada's defence spending is only 1.1% of GDP. Only Luxembourg (0.9%) and Iceland (nil - Iceland has no military) spend less. Ibid., Appendix Seven.
11. Ibid., 16.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid., 30.
14. Ibid., 37.
15. Many, if not most non-commissioned members in the 1945 to 1975 period lacked full high school educations, and some had not even finished public school. Nevertheless, most of them were good soldiers and good technicians.



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